

Spotlight Country: Sri Lanka

DEMOGRAPHICS

Geographic area: 62,710 sq. km.
Population: 20,639,000 (2014)
Below 24 yrs. old: 40%
Refugee population: 511
Urban population: 18.4%
GDP/capita: \$3,926
Unemployment: 4.3%
Below poverty line: 6.7%

COMMUNICATIONS AND LITERACY

FH Media Freedom: Not Free
Internet users/100 people: 26 (2014)
Mobile phones/100 people: 103 (2014)
Literacy: 91%
Avg. years of education: Females: 14 (2013)
Males: 14 (2013)

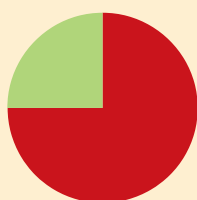
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY SPENDING

D&CP Total FY13 Actual: \$906,556 FY14 Actual: \$885,370 FY15 Actual: \$1,762,009

Total Reported FY13 Actual: \$4,148,613 FY14 Actual: \$928,094 FY15 Actual: \$2,025,308

(Total reported funding for FY13, FY14, and FY15 cannot be compared directly due to delays in reporting from long program cycles.)

D&CP PD Spending by Theme

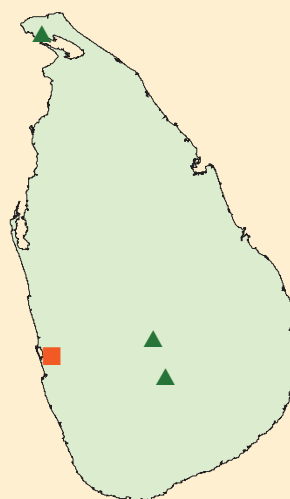


Piechart Key: PD Spending by Theme

■ Culture ■ Education ■ Economics ■ Science ■ Military ■ CVE
■ Democracy ■ Civil Society ■ Women ■ Youth ■ Religious ■ Other

D&CP Spending by Activity

Other \$674,955
VIP Visits (Press Support) \$662,354
American Centers \$195,037
Media/Press Activities \$44,911
Supplementing ECA Programs \$30,185



Map Key

■ Embassy ● Consulate
▲ American Space

RECOMMENDATIONS:

INCREASE BASE BUDGET FOR GREATER CIVIL SOCIETY

OUTREACH: The Public Affairs Section (PAS) in Colombo saw its budget decrease by 10 percent, from \$675,910 to \$608,027 in fiscal year 2016. Given this reduction, the amount of funding available for grants decreased 31 percent, from \$202,510 to \$139,668. Due to the need for greater civil society and youth outreach to contribute to critical mission goals of peace and reconciliation, an increase in the overall budget, which would allow a grants budget of at least \$200,000 is critical. In addition, an increase in training and support for local Sri Lankan public diplomacy professionals is also important so that they can responsibly administer these grants. The budget for PAS Colombo is used for public diplomacy not only in Sri Lanka but also in Maldives, and as such seems low when compared to similar-sized PD operations. We strongly recommend an overall budget increase to roughly \$750,000, which is still well below the median \$1.9 million public diplomacy budgets for U.S. missions worldwide.

AIM FOR MORE CONSISTENT AMERICAN AND SRI LANKAN STAFFING PATTERNS IN COLOMBO:

Because of the increasingly positive relationship with the Sri Lanka government, the workload for PAS has increased considerably but the staffing has not always kept up. When there are not enough American

PD professionals serving at post, the workflow can break down. We understand that all American vacancies in the PAS have been filled for the remainder of 2016, and that PAS has added a new American public diplomacy position to cover Maldives, which will hopefully sustain in coming years. The new position should be added to the section's permanent staffing for future years.

ADD AN AMERICAN SPACE IN THE SOUTH: There are three American Spaces in Sri Lanka – the American Center in Colombo and two American Corners in the northern and central hubs of Kandy and Jaffna. These spaces have facilitated sustained interregional engagement that supports post-war reconciliation. Building upon well-established partnerships with NGOs in the South, the mission hopes to establish a fourth space in Matara, which ACPD strongly supports given that it receives a boost in its budgets for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 or additional funding from IIP. PAS has identified the public library in Matara as the ideal location for the space, as USAID funding following the 2004 tsunami equipped the facility with all necessary amenities. We strongly recommend additional funding to open a fourth American Space in the south.

OVERVIEW

With the newly elected Sirisena administration, the U.S.-Sri Lanka bilateral relationship has improved considerably, which provides new opportunities for U.S. public diplomacy efforts. The Sri Lankan public underwent considerable trauma for decades. It has been seven years since the Sri Lankan military's defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and nearly 12 years since the 2004 tsunami when more than 35,300 Sri Lankans were killed and more than 1 million affected—the most of the 10 countries affected. President Maithripala Sirisena has consistently articulated the need to be inclusive across religious and ethnic lines to maintain the peace and move the country toward greater progress.

ACPD found a small team facing overwhelming opportunity that is active throughout the country despite a small budget. In May 2015, Secretary Kerry's delivered a speech in Colombo that outlined four areas of U.S. cooperation with Sri Lanka: peace and reconciliation, justice and accountability, advancement of human rights, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Traditional public diplomacy tools—exchanges, professional development trainings, social and traditional media outreach, and American Spaces—work to support this cooperation. They work actively to empower civil society actors and amplify voices of reconciliation, many of whom are in their impressive network of 2,600 alumni. But meeting these goals also requires a great amount of civil society support, which comes in the form of grants. Given the small amount of funding they have to work with and their inconsistent staffing patterns, the section has done a remarkable job and merits an increase in financial and human resources.

BUDGET

The public affairs section in Colombo saw its budget decrease by 10 percent, from \$675,910 to \$608,027 in fiscal year 2016. Its highest costs are salaries for local employees, with the next largest amount dedicated to grants to local civil society organizations. In fiscal year 2016, in line with an overall budget decrease, the amount dedicated for grants decreased 31 percent, from \$202,510 to \$139,668. Due to the need for greater civil society and youth outreach to contribute to significant mission goals of peace and reconciliation, an increase in the overall budget, which would allow a grants budget of at least \$200,000, is critical. The budget for PAS Colombo is used for public diplomacy not only in Sri Lanka but also in Maldives, and as such seems low when compared to similar-sized public diplomacy operations. We strongly recommend an overall budget increase to roughly \$750,000, which is still well below the median \$1.9 million public diplomacy budgets for U.S. missions worldwide.

STAFFING AND TRAINING

Because of the now positive relationship with Sri Lanka, the workload has increased considerably but the staffing has not kept up. When there are not enough American PD professionals serving at post, the workflow can become disrupted. We understand that all American vacancies in PAS have been filled for the remainder of 2016, and that PAS has added a new American public diplomacy position to cover Maldives, which will hopefully sustain in coming years. The new position should be added to the section's permanent staffing for future years.

Grants are the currency for PD programs and the Sri Lankan staff in particular is requesting more consistent grants training to keep up with frequent changes in processes and rules from Washington. They rightly worry about the need to monitor potential abuse and whether or not they are properly trained to do so. ACPD recommends consistent regional training opportunities for them to be proper stewards of U.S. taxpayer dollars. An increase in training and support for local Sri Lankan public diplomacy professionals will help them continue to responsibly administer these grants.

We understand that a contact management database was rolled out at post last year, but implementation has been slow and the database is not utilized by all sections. There is need for an evaluation as to whether this is the best database to better track the alumni network and potential candidates for exchanges, especially the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). If so, it should be implemented and used by all sections. If not, post should look at other options. Due to a high level of turnover among American staff, consistent use of a transparent database would improve communication between the economic, political and public diplomacy local and American staff.

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS

The Public Affairs Section facilitates core ECA programs such as IVLP, Fulbright and Humphrey programs, English Access, English Language Fellows, e-Teacher program, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and the Community Solutions Program. There have been 2,600 Sri Lankan alumni who have been part of U.S. exchanges since 1952, 79 of whom have been added in the last year. Post provides skills training and opportunities for them via an Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) grant for the Federating Women Entrepreneur Associations in Sri Lanka, which creates a platform for regional women entrepreneurial associations to collectively support and amplify the role of women entrepreneurs in the country. Another AEIF grant with C-Span creates an online repository of parliamentary sessions and select forums and conferences where public policy is discussed in Sri Lanka.

PAS also facilitates a considerable amount of engagement activities focused on entrepreneurship, the environment, English language education, STEM, and cultural

performances. These include a speaker program on environmental conservation for university students and the public; science education programs for youth and a citizen scientist water testing project; English language training for pre-service and in-service teachers, in addition to members of the public; and art exhibitions and performances.

In late 2015, Embassy Colombo hosted U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power, who spoke about the importance of inclusiveness in government and society to a town hall for students and young civil society activists. PAS Colombo has also hosted multiple visits by Assistant Secretary Tom Malinowski, and arranged and facilitated a policy speech for Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon. In June, PAS welcomed Tanya Somanader, White House Director of Digital Rapid Response, who led a series of workshops on Right to Information (RTI). Her meetings with high level government officials proved influential in convincing the government to sign on to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multi-lateral initiative to make governments more transparent, shortly after her visit. Most recently PAS organized several entrepreneurship-focused speaker visits. In July, IIP expert speaker Samira Cook Gaines, the Chief of Economic Empowerment for the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), returned to Sri Lanka following the high turnout during her last visit in September 2015. Post also brought three American venture capitalists to participate in the Information and Communication Technology Agency's (ICTA) "Disrupt Asia" investor forum. The visits were part of an ongoing public diplomacy campaign to support innovation and entrepreneurship across the country.

SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

The U.S. Embassy in Colombo has an impressive social media presence in an increasingly wired and connected Sri Lanka. PAS manages four platforms for U.S. Embassy Colombo's outreach: Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/colombo.usembassy>), which has more than 127,000 followers; Twitter (<https://twitter.com/USEmbSL>) which has 54,000 followers; YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/USEmbassySrilanka>); Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usembassycolombo/>); and Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/usembsl/>), which has 550 followers. The U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka also has a Twitter page with more than 4,000 followers (<https://twitter.com/USAmbKeshap>).

Much of the content is generated in Sri Lanka. The PAS uses IIP campaign material that resonates with Sri Lankans, most specifically material on Black History Month and World Press Freedom Day, but also the 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Summit, LGBTI Pride Month, material

on the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21), and the #16 days of activism against gender based violence campaign. It would be helpful to have more ShareAmerica content on peace and reconciliation and disaster preparedness, given that those are major mission goals that public diplomacy activities particularly support.

AMERICAN SPACES: COLOMBO AND KANDY

There are three American Spaces in Sri Lanka – Colombo, Kandy and Jaffna. The Colombo space is in the old U.S. chancery, where the Public Affairs Section staff is also based. It offers a range of programming targeted towards youth, especially on technology and entrepreneurship. The priority American Space in Kandy, in central Sri Lanka, recently received \$600,000 from IIP to undergo a renovation. It is now an inviting, dynamic space for Sri Lankans to learn English and receive technology and entrepreneurship training. PAS promotes programs that connect the spaces and the Youth Forums (see below). The American Center in Colombo offers regular management workshops and coding classes, while the American Corner in Kandy regularly hosts business English and entrepreneurship incubator courses. In the coming months, both American Spaces will be equipped with Maker Space technologies and programs, including 3D printers and basic programming devices to inspire and promote innovation. The American Space in Jaffna, in the north, is a partnership with a local NGO. The mission is also contemplating a fourth space in southern Sri Lanka, which ACPD strongly supports, particularly if PAS receives a boost in its budgets for fiscal years 2017 and FY 2018 and can engage southern Sri Lankans in a more sustained way.

ENGAGING YOUTH

The Youth Forum is a leadership development program for Sri Lankan youth who use the American Spaces as a gathering point. They include young persons of all ethnicities and faiths—Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians. They complete projects that call attention to issues not normally covered by the mainstream news media, such as the environment, small business successes, women's empowerment issues, and local peace-building projects. Recent PAS initiatives to engage youth include an interregional youth cricket tournament in Matara, which brought together teams from Jaffna, Kandy, and Matara for three days of matches, service projects, and reconciliation-focused programs. The American Center and American Spaces have also recently hosted visiting speakers who encouraged innovation, entrepreneurship, and other youth-empowering skills.